



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, PROCESS AND PRACTICES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNDERTAKINGS IN KARNATAKA STATE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of corporate communication has been widened to include the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and various stakeholders who matter most from the point of view of business management. The present study evaluates the corporate communication system, process and practices of leading public and private undertakings with special reference to Karnataka State. The crucial importance of corporate communication becomes highly relevant in the present times since the world moves towards globalization of communication and economy. A synthesis of the available literature suggest that corporate communication scenario of Karnataka State suffers from certain limitations. The present study approached the problem through a systematic survey method, which is popular in Mass Communication and Journalism and other branches of Social Science. The implications of the findings of the study on the system, process and practices of corporate communication in leading corporate houses of Karnataka State namely – Bharat Earth Movers Limited, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, MphasiS and Biocon sensitize the various stakeholders corporate communication for better practice and performance. The investigation reveals that it is imperative to formulate a corporate communication policy in the new millennium since modern corporate houses are required to race against the time and rise to the occasion in reaching out to various stakeholders. The policy makers of public and private corporate houses are also required to expand and develop corporate communication system by involving the visionaries and missionaries in the field concerned. A separate training division would facilitate constant development of human resources in the corporate communication department of the select corporate houses. The corporate communicators should also be encouraged to gain the benefit of specialization in various branches of corporate communication management in modern society. The corporate communication activities need management support and active involvement of various branches of organizational management. The study emphasizes that inter-departmental coordination would enrich the status of corporate communication in select corporate houses. The modern corporate houses should also formulate a set of sound ethical considerations and practices in order to prevent unlawful and unhealthy corporate communication practices. The corporate communicators also required proper training and orientation in the art of image building and demonstrating the socially beneficial programmes of the corporate houses through adequate communication campaigns. The practice of corporate communication demands integrated approaches in general and application of multimedia in particular. The future agenda for corporate communication management in select corporate houses must deal with the process of corporate social responsibility and adoption of sound ethical practices. The corporate communication services have to be rendered with due respect to professional ethics and corporate social responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

As competition increases, within and across genres, modern corporate houses are experimenting with new methods and media to create their brands and enhance the institutional reputation. The concept of corporate communication has been widened to include the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and various stakeholders who matter most from the point of view of business management. The corporate communicators are using both traditional and modern media of communication in order to reach out to various publics and enlist their active participation in the affairs of the modern public and private undertakings. The present study evaluates the corporate communication system, process and practices of leading public and private undertakings with special reference to Karnataka State.

Review of Literature

Very few researchers have evaluated the role of corporate communication in the process of reputation management and organizational development all over the world. Prominent among them include: Agarwal (1975), Abelow and Hilpert (1986), Devarajan (1996), Van (1997), Gill (1998), Wadhwa (1998), Balmer and Gray (2000), Hatch (2001), Jo et al. (2001), Yamauchi (2001), Argenti and Forman (2002), Center and Jackson (2002), Yi-Luo (2003), Fernandez (2004), Mamatha (2004), Davis (2007), Prakash (2007), Elena (2008), Law (2008), Sapna (2008), Banerjee (2009), Zulhamri (2009), Argenti (2010), Ilan and Li (2010), Ananthakrishnan (2011), Can (2012) and Nielsen (2012). The major deficiency observed in their works was the lack of emphasis either on corporate communication system in Indian modern organizations or on the intervention of corporate communication for business management with special reference to modern corporate houses representing public and private sectors in Karnataka State.

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Significance of the Study

The crucial importance of corporate communication becomes highly relevant in the present times since the world moves towards globalization of communication and economy. In developing countries and leading public and private undertakings, corporate communication has become a thrust area from research and development point of view. It is necessary to examine the system, process and practices of corporate communication in public and private undertakings in Karnataka State. A synthesis of the available literature suggest that corporate communication scenario of Karnataka State suffers from certain limitations. A perusal of relevant literature also reveals that the past researchers have not investigated the system, process and practices of corporate communication in public and private undertakings of Karnataka State, which is marching towards progress. Therefore, the primary tasks of the present study are concerned with identifying reasonably representative sample of internal and external publics of these organizations so as to assess their views on the current status of corporate communication with special reference to public and private undertakings of Karnataka State.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the attitude of the management towards corporate communication in leading public and private undertakings.
- To study the system of corporate communication in leading public and private undertakings.
- To assess the practice of employee relations in leading public and private undertakings.
- To analyze the practice of financial relations in leading public and private undertakings.
- To examine the practice of customer relations in leading public and private undertakings.
- To evaluate the practice of government relations in leading public and private undertakings.
- To explore the practice of media relations in leading public and private undertakings.
- To appreciate the practice of community relations in leading public and private undertakings; and
- To suggest appropriate strategies of corporate communication in leading public and private undertakings.

Research Methodology

The present study approached the problem through a systematic survey method, which is popular in Mass Communication and Journalism and other branches of Social Science. The development of corporate communication in India and abroad was traced and documented by following historical research methodology. The system, process and practices of corporate communication in select public and private undertakings were evaluated through a scientific empirical investigation. A structured and pre-tested interview schedule was administered to the representative sample consisting of both internal and external publics. Appropriate statistical tests were conducted to analyze the primary data, draw inferences, test the hypotheses and make recommendations.

Distribution of the Sample

Respondent Groups	Male	Female	Total
1. Customers	40	20	60
2. Local Community	42	18	60
3. Financiers	35	24	60
4. Media Professionals	22	38	60
5. Government Officials	36	24	60
6. Employees	180	60	240
Total	356	184	540

Statistical Analysis

The study being descriptive in nature, no parametric statistical tests were involved to draw inferences based on the sample results. The

interpretation of the chi-square and contingency table analysis justify the assumption of independence which was primarily carried out at the 0.05% level of significance. The major statistical tests carried out in the present study include – frequencies and percentages, chi-square test and contingency table analysis.

Limitations of the Study

The usual limitations of the survey method and case study, namely time, human inadequacies, resource constraints, recollection and communication were experienced by the researcher. It was practically not possible to contact all the internal and external stakeholders due to lack of time and resources. An exhaustive and intensive survey as well as case study was not possible because of large numbers and above practical constraints. Stratified sampling was followed in selecting the respondents since this method of selection also gives significantly correct results with much less time, manpower, money and materials. Though much care was taken to collect the data, the memory bias on the part of the respondents cannot be completely ruled out.

Findings of the Study

Practices of Employee Relations

A majority of the respondents have recognized maintenance of healthy employee relations (75.83%), education of the employees on institutional policies and programmes (79.17%), availability of opportunities for employees' participation (64.17%), consideration of the employees as key stakeholders of organization (74.17%), maintenance of cordial relations with the employees (70.0%), creation of better working conditions (62.50%), constant communication with employees (77.50%), availability of internal communication services to the employees (59.17%), enhancement of career graph of the employees (55.83%), creation of sense of belonging among the employees (58.33%), existence of favorable work oriented attitude among the employees (60.0%), consideration of view points of employees in the promotional activities (57.50%), existence of employees' grievances redressal mechanism (61.67%), creation of comradeship among the employees (53.33%) and sustenance of bonding among the employees (61.67%).

Tools of Employee Relations

The overall analysis revealed significant differences in the frequencies for the tools of employee relations. Most of the respondents indicated the response 'sometimes' for group meetings (56.67%), personal contacts (59.17%) and letters (55.0%). A majority of the respondents indicated the response 'rarely' for orientation programme (54.17%), training programme (54.17%), teleconferencing (54.17%), trade union leaders meeting (65.83%), video cassette display (60.83%), circulars (54.17%) and backgrounders (65.0%). More number of respondents also indicated the response 'very rarely' for guidance and counseling (62.50%), grievance committee (52.50%), employees' conference (60.0%), house journals (79.17%), video conferencing (60.0%), film and slide presentation (60.0%), displays and exhibits (66.67%) and suggestion system (60.0%). Surprisingly, the respondents indicated the responses 'all times' for closed circuit television (89.17%) and 'not at all' for joint consultative committee (65.0%) and opinion survey (85.83%). The association between the nature of organization and tools of employees' communication was found to be non-significant indicating similarity in the responses.

Practices of Financial Relations

A majority of the respondents have recognized the existence of suitable financial relations policy and mechanism (76.67%), consideration of financiers as significant stakeholders (83.33%), periodic briefing of the financiers about its achievements (63.33%), availability of information about the products and services to the financiers (80.0%), organization of frequent interactive sessions with the financiers (70.0%), maintenance of fruitful financial relationship (76.67%), conduction of successful financial relations programmes

(66.67%), projection of organizational achievements in the media (80.0%), organization of periodic promotional events (70.0%), collection of feedback from the financiers regularly (73.33%), accountability to the financiers (63.33%), development of an official financiers' response system (66.67%), constant improvement of financial relations (70.0%), image building exercises (63.33%) and systematic promotion of financial status (70.0%).

Tools of Financial Relations

The overall analysis revealed significant differences in the frequencies for the tools of financial relations. Most of the respondents indicated the response 'rarely' for financiers' conference (56.67%), video cassette display (70.0%) and displays and exhibits (66.67%). The respondents also indicated the response 'very rarely' for opinion leaders meeting (63.33%), group meetings (60.0%), personal contacts (63.33%), presentations in meetings (56.67%), official visits / plant visits / project visits (60.0%), open house for financiers (60.0%), meeting of key financiers (56.67%), promotion visits (60.0%), backgrounders (76.67%), financiers' kit (66.67%), teleconferencing (60.0%) and film and slide presentation (63.33%). The respondents further indicated the response 'sometimes' for closed circuit television (73.33%). Surprisingly, most of the respondents indicated the responses 'not at all' for grievance committee (63.33%), joint consultative committee (70.0%), video conferencing (66.67%), suggestion system (83.33%) and opinion survey (90.0%). The respondents did not identify any tool of financial relations which was used 'all times' by the public and private undertakings.

Practices of Customer Relations

A majority of the respondents have recognized the formulation of customer relations policy and mechanism (76.67%), existence of customer relations communication network (70.0%), presence of open and transparent customer communication system (66.67%), conduction of marketing survey (80.0%), successful management of brand (86.67%), need-based services to the customers (76.67%), frequent interaction with the customers (70.0%), active participation of the customers in the corporate affairs (63.33%), media campaigns to create the confidence of customers (66.67%), projection of quality control measures through media campaigns (60.0%), monitoring of customer issues, needs and demands (63.33%), implementation of customer oriented services (60.0%), official customer response system (70.0%), collection of feedback from the customers (76.67%) and corporate social responsibility (56.67%).

Tools of Customer Relations

The overall analysis revealed significant differences in the frequencies for the tools of customer relations. Surprisingly, most of the respondents indicated the response 'not at all' for group meetings (60.0%), teleconferencing (76.67%), customer kit (83.33%), backgrounders (63.33%), presentations in meetings (76.67%), personal contacts (63.33%), customer conference (83.33%), official visits / plant visits / project visits (83.33%), meeting of key customers (76.67%), grievance committee (86.67%), joint consultative committee (83.33%) and opinion survey (83.33%). A majority of the respondents indicated the response 'rarely' for video cassette display (73.33%), displays and exhibits (56.67%) and film and slide presentation (63.33%). The respondents also indicated the response 'very rarely' for opinion leaders meeting (66.67%), coordination committee (73.33%), open house for customers (70.0%), video conferencing (76.67%), closed circuit television (66.67%) and suggestion system (73.33%). None of the respondents indicated the response 'all times' for any tool of customer relations.

Practices of Government Relations

A majority of the respondents have recognized the practice of government relations (63.33%), regular interaction with the government bodies (66.67%), information flow to the government

officials on its activities (70.0%), active political lobbying (66.67%), enhancement of favorable attitude of the government functionaries (66.67%), absolute transparency over organizational activities (60.0%), excellent rapport with the government bodies (63.33%), boosting of organizational credibility and prosperity by socially responsible actions (56.67%), demonstration of corporate social responsibility (53.33%), collection of regular feedback from the opinion makers in the government (56.67%), favorable projection of projects (60.0%), strategic relationship between the government agencies and management (73.33%), honoring the constructive criticisms from the government agencies (66.67%), recognition of changing political environment (70.0%) and development of official government response system (76.67%).

Tools of Government Relations

The overall analysis revealed significant differences in the frequencies for the tools of government relations. Most of the respondents indicated the responses 'very rarely' for group meetings (66.67%), coordination committee (63.33%), official visits / plant visits / project visits (63.33%), open house (73.33%), coalition building (63.33%), political action committee (73.33%), backgrounders (63.33%), officials kit (56.67%) and film and slide presentation (63.33%). A majority of the respondents indicated the response 'rarely' for presentations in meetings (63.33%), lobbying (60.0%), political education and support activities (56.67%), video conferencing (63.33%) and suggestion system (60.0%). The respondents also indicated the response 'sometimes' for personal contacts (60.0%), meeting of key government officials (56.67%), closed circuit television (56.67%), video cassette display (63.33%) and teleconferencing (63.33%). A majority of the respondents indicated the response 'not at all' for displays and exhibits (76.67%) and opinion survey (76.67%). None of the respondents indicated the response 'all times' for any tool of government relations.

Practices of Media Relations

A majority of the respondents have recognized the practice of meaningful media relations (86.67%), enhancement of visibility in the media (73.33%), projection of organizational activities in the media (80.0%), interactive communication with the media (73.33%), increase of opportunities for interaction with media (66.67%), maintenance of good rapport with the media (80.0%), obtaining regular media support for corporate social responsibility (70.0%), honoring media comments and criticisms (60.0%), development of conducive media network (53.33%), projection of organizational reputation (63.33%), analysis of media feedback and positive response (60.0%), coordination of media activities (66.67%), maintenance of cordial media relations (70.0%), development of an official media response system (60.0%) and systematic evaluation of media relations programmes (56.67%).

Tools of Media Relations

The overall analysis revealed significant differences in the frequencies for the tools of media relations. Most of the respondents indicated the responses 'rarely' for personal contacts (66.67%), coordination committee (65.0%), open house (73.33%), media kit (66.67%), closed circuit television (73.33%), video cassette display (63.33%) and film and slide presentation (60.0%). A majority of the respondents indicated the response 'not at all' for group meetings (60.0%), coalition building (66.67%), media education activities (80.0%), video conferencing (90.0%), suggestion system (70.0%) and opinion survey (90.0%). The respondents also indicated the response 'very rarely' for meeting of key media professionals (66.67%), backgrounders (73.33%), teleconferencing (66.67%), media action committee (73.33%) and displays and exhibits (53.33%). A majority of the respondents indicated the response 'sometimes' for media conference (56.67%), official visits / plant visits / project visits (56.67%) and media support activities (70.0%). None of the respondents indicated the response 'all times' for any tool of media relations.

Practices of Community Relations

A majority of the respondents have recognized the presence of community relations policy and system (60.0%), pro-active measures to serve the community (60.0%), delivery of community oriented services (60.0%), implementation of community welfare activities (63.33%), adoption of open door policy (66.67%), opportunities for regular interaction with the community (63.33%), active community participation in the welfare activities (70.0%), implementation of need based community welfare programmes (63.33%), reputation management through CSR (56.67%), community relations mechanism (53.33%), responding to the needs and demands of the community (60.0%), absence of adequate community infrastructure (63.33%), adequate employment opportunities to the community (60.0%), regular monitoring of community issues, needs and demands by the corporate house (65.0%) and absence of official community response system (60.0%).

Tools of Community Relations

The overall analysis revealed significant differences in the frequencies for the tools of community relations. Most of the respondents indicated the response 'rarely' for group meetings (56.67%), personal contacts (63.33%), presentations in meetings (66.67%), official visits / plant visits / project visits (56.67%), sponsorship of special events (56.67%) and video cassette display (70.0%). The respondents also indicated the response 'very rarely' for coordination committee (53.33%), opinion leaders' meeting (63.33%) and film and slide presentation (70.0%). Surprisingly, most of the respondents indicated the response 'not at all' for open house (63.33%), convention of community members (53.33%), grievance committee (56.67%), joint consultative committee (83.33%), backgrounders (56.67%), house journals (83.33%), video conferencing (93.33%), closed circuit television (100%), teleconferencing (80.0%), suggestion system (90.0%) and opinion survey (83.33%). However, about 56.67% of the respondents have observed that displays and exhibits were used 'sometimes' for community relations. The respondents did not identify any tool of community relations which was used 'all times' by the public and private undertakings.

Testing of Hypotheses

H1. The public and private corporate houses have developed healthy employee relations initiatives and tools.

The data reveal that the public and private corporate houses have developed healthy employee relations initiatives and tools. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

H2. The public and private corporate houses have developed meaningful financial relations initiatives and tools.

The data reveal that the public and private corporate houses have developed meaningful financial relations initiatives and tools. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

H3. The public and private corporate houses have developed positive customer relations initiatives and tools.

The data reveal that the public and private corporate houses have developed positive customer relations initiatives and tools. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

H4. The public and private corporate houses have developed constructive government relations initiatives and tools.

The data reveal that the public and private corporate houses have developed constructive government relations initiatives and tools. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

H5. The public and private corporate houses have developed sound media relations initiatives and tools.

The data reveal that the public and private corporate houses have developed sound media relations initiatives and tools. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

H6. The public and private corporate houses have developed congenial community relations initiatives and tools.

The data reveal that the public and private corporate houses have developed congenial community relations initiatives and tools. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

Implications

The implications of the findings of the study on the system, process and practices of corporate communication in leading corporate houses of Karnataka State namely – Bharat Earth Movers Limited, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, MphasiS and Biocon in general terms are given below:

Corporate Communication Policy

The investigation reveals that it is imperative to formulate a corporate communication policy in the new millennium since modern corporate houses are required to race against the time and rise to the occasion in reaching out to various stakeholders, motivating them to accept the policies and products and enlisting their active participation in the processes of organizational development, business promotion, brand management, image building, events management, disaster management, crisis management and so on. The leading public sector and private sector organizations like BEML, BHEL, MphasiS and Biocon are called upon to formulate specific corporate communication policy in consultation with leading professionals and specialists in the field concerned.

Corporate Communication System

The policy makers of public and private corporate houses are also required to expand and develop corporate communication system by involving the visionaries and missionaries in the field concerned. These houses should also equip the corporate communication divisions with the state of the art technologies, resources and services in order to carve a niche for themselves in the field of corporate governance. The corporate houses should make use of advanced corporate communication practices and tools which can enhance better rapport between the corporate houses and various stakeholders who matter most in the present times.

Human Resources Management

The corporate communicators need adequate exposure on the application of corporate communication tools and technologies with special reference to various stakeholders. Series of orientation and refresher courses are essential to standardize the practice of corporate communication and equip the professionals with advanced capabilities and strategies. A separate training division would facilitate constant development of human resources in the corporate communication department of the select corporate houses.

Strategy Making and Execution of Services

The corporate communicators should also be encouraged to gain the benefit of specialization in various branches of corporate communication management in modern society. The strategy making and execution of programmes should be undertaken on the basis of systematic evaluation of the ground realities, changing dynamics and other professional considerations.

Inter-Departmental Coordination

The corporate communication activities need management support and active involvement of various branches of organizational management. The study emphasizes that inter-departmental coordination would enrich the status of corporate communication in select corporate houses. The human resources development, finance, materials management, production, engineering, corporate communication and other departments should work in close collaboration in order to sustain the reputation of the corporate houses.

The study underlines the importance of inter-departmental coordination for better organizational management and development.

Professional Ethics

The modern corporate houses should also formulate a set of sound ethical considerations and practices in order to prevent unlawful and unhealthy corporate communication practices. The professionals should also be encouraged to follow ethically sound and appropriate means and mechanisms in order to maintain positive identity for the modern corporate houses. The corporate watch dog committees should also be established by the select corporate houses in order to monitor, evaluate and guide corporate communication practices.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The modern corporate houses are required to understand the concept, nature and significance of corporate social responsibility. The corporate communicators are also required to adequately communicate the socially beneficial programmes of the corporate houses in order to win over the good will and support of various stakeholders of organizational development in the modern age of corporate social responsibility. The corporate communicators also require proper training and orientation in the art of image building and demonstrating the socially beneficial programmes of the corporate houses through adequate communication campaigns.

Scientific Evaluation

The corporate communication policy, planning, programming, activities, effects and other aspects should be subjected to regular scientific evaluation by the experts in research and development. The present evaluation reveals that adequate scientific surveys are not conducted by the corporate houses in order to assess the effectiveness of corporate communication. Hence, scientific evaluation should become an important component of corporate communication in modern corporate houses in order to feel the pulse of various stakeholders and ensure constant adjustment with the changing social and economic environments.

Ideal Media Mix

The practice of corporate communication demands integrated approaches in general and application of multi media in particular. The following media mix is suggested by the researcher in order to enhance the status of corporate communication in modern society.

- a. Adequate print and electronic media are required to ensure the success of corporate communication.
- b. The institutional communication channels such as joint consultative committee, suggestion system, coordination committees, interface sessions, seminars, brainstorming sessions, periodic assessments and so on are required to enrich the process of corporate communication.
- c. New media and social media application would make corporate communication highly accessible in the age of information and communication revolution.
- d. Extension communication programmes like demonstration, exhibition, outdoor publicity, public service advertising, open house, opinion survey and other promotional activities are also essential to boost the status of corporate communication.
- e. Multi-media oriented integrated corporate communication services are required to broaden the base of corporate communication in the present times.

Implications on Future Research

The future researchers can focus the attention of corporate leaders on – corporate communication policy, corporate communication planning, employee relations, investor relations, distributor relations, supplier relations, consumer relations, community relations,

government relations, media relations, crisis management, disaster management, events management, reputation management and so on. These aspects are directly associated with the system, process and practice of corporate communication in modern organizations. The researcher is very conscious of the significance of corporate communication in the new millennium with reference to India and other developing nations. Corporate communication demands integrated approaches and multimedia applications which constitute enduring areas of research in corporate communication.

Conclusion

Modern corporate houses like BEML, BHEL, Mphasis and Biocon have achieved commendable success in the business management in general. These corporate houses have certainly realized the significance of corporate communication in the new millennium. A surge in corporate communication interest is typically attributed to the strong relationship between the corporate communication and business management. The future agenda for corporate communication management in select corporate houses must deal with the process of corporate social responsibility and adoption of sound ethical practices. The corporate communication services have to be rendered with due respect to professional ethics and corporate social responsibility.

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